

# A son's quest, a secret and a house where hope lived

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Larry Newman paced around his apartment, trying to find just the right words before he made the call that would change his life.

It was the last step in a long and emotional journey to clear up the mysteries surrounding his birth, a journey that had taken him from his home in Chatham to the windswept prairies of Canada to the suburban streets of Huntington, Long Island.

Newman already had learned that his father, Francis Joseph Ferraiolo, of Huntington, had died in a car accident in 1968. Ferraiolo's pregnant girlfriend, Mary Clothilde Roach, had returned to her native Canada and put her baby up for adoption. She never told the young man's family about the child.

Newman had searched for clues about his father at the Huntington library, finding articles about the accident and his obituary. The funeral had taken place right next door, at St. Patrick's Church.

Newman slipped into the church during Mass, and he thought about his father's life in this church, this neighborhood, in a nearby house on a tree-lined street. Then he drove home to New Jersey.

Online, he found a phone number for someone named Ferraiolo, and an address -- the same address listed as the family residence in the obituary, all those years ago.

Could the same family still be there? Should he just call? What should he say?

He called. A voice mail recording mentioned a cell number. He called the number and a man answered.

"Hello, is this John Ferraiolo? My name is Larry Newman, I'm adopted, and, was someone in your family in a car accident? You may not be aware, but ..."

"I know," said the voice, cutting him off. "That's why I kept the house."

Ferraiolo, it turned out, had lived with his brother's secret -- Newman's father's secret -- for decades. He held on to the family home, just in case the child ever came knocking.

Newman was speechless.

"Well, you can sell the house now," he finally got out.

## A STARTING POINT

Newman, 37, is one of 10,000 adoptees whose records are available at the Children's Aid and Family Services, one of the largest social services agencies in northern New Jersey. The agency has a Search and Reunion Department that helps people like Newman trace their roots. Many of them have no idea where to start, and the agency wants to get the word out.

"Finding my family, my history, my story, has been a gift. I'm part of something so much bigger than myself," Newman said.

Not that he had anything to complain about, he is quick to point out. Newman was adopted at 8

months and raised by loving parents, Bill and Rose Mary Newman of Dumont. Larry is the middle child in a family with an older brother, also adopted, and a sister born 11 years after he joined the family. Newman had a "pretty normal" and happy childhood that instilled in him a love of music, art and travel.

His parents were always open about adopting the boys, who had come to New Jersey through the Sister Mary Eugene Foundation, which placed babies born in Canada.

The Newmans were told the baby's biological father might have died in a car accident, and, unlike many adoptees, the baby had his birth certificate and birth name, Francis Joseph Roach -- "like the bug," Newman said with a laugh.

But that was it.

### HIS QUEST BEGINS

Newman went to college, got an MBA and was pursuing a career in the business world three years ago when a friend and colleague died suddenly at 48, leaving behind a wife and two children. The death triggered a dormant urge to know about his own medical history, and where he came from.

The first step was to call the Department of Community Services in Nova Scotia. In 1974, he was told, the Sister Mary Eugene Foundation had merged with the Children's Aid and Adoption Society of New Jersey, which changed its name to Children's Aid and Family Services.

His records were not in Halifax, but at the agency's office in Cedar Knolls, just a short drive from his home. Gloria Smith, of the search and reunion department, gave him a report with no names -- laws protect the privacy of the birth parents.

Larry's mother, "Mary," was a 20-year-old "with brown hair and eyes, an oval face and a pleasant smile," according to the report. She had come from Nova Scotia to work as a "domestic" in New York, sending money home to support a son she had borne at 17. She came from a family of poor miners, part Scottish, part French, and Mary never finished high school.

His father was also 20, from a large Long Island family of Italian and Irish descent. He was 5-foot-10 and 135 pounds -- almost the same as Newman's own physique. And yes, he had died in an automobile accident on April 24, 1968.

The baby, named for his father, was born in a rural Nova Scotia hospital on Dec. 29, 1968. At 8 pounds, 7 ounces, he was a "healthy" weight, relieving some of Newman's concerns about his medical history. Doing the math, he realized he was conceived just weeks before his father's death.

"I was just numb, reading this. It was so emotional. So much tragedy. Adoption is a happy thing, but juxtaposed against this loss, a woman who lost her boyfriend, lost me. She'd been through a lot," he said.

Did he want to meet this woman who had suffered so much loss? Would she want to meet him?

Swallowing his doubts, he sat down and wrote a long letter. Smith forwarded it, with photographs, to the woman Newman knew only as "Mary."

### A MOTHER'S CALL

He needn't have worried.

Mary Clothilde Roach Fraser had been hoping all these years she might hear from her son. The day

she got the letter, she called him from her home in Brandon in Manitoba, Canada, a flat treeless stretch of prairie and wheat fields 100 miles west of the provincial capital of Winnipeg.

They talked and then Mary Clothilde, or Tellie, as she's called, finally got to the point: "Do you want information or a relationship? If you want information, fine. I'm willing to have a relationship, but only if you want to."

Newman, a hard-charging marketing consultant with so many frequent-flyer miles he spent \$10 on a recent flight to Hawaii, was struck she wasn't interested in his achievements.

"She was interested in me as a person. Was I happy?" he said.

He traveled to Brandon in April 2005, and the consultant and the homemaker of modest means hit it off. During hours of talk, sipping tea, Tellie told Newman how he came to be.

Young Tellie had met her boyfriend, Francis Joseph Ferraiolo, while working for a wealthy family near Huntington. The pretty girl met the handsome local boy in a bar, and they started dating.

Their first movie date was "Planet of the Apes," starring Charlton Heston, Tellie recalled. The couple grew closer, although they saw each other only on Tellie's day off, Wednesday. Chip, as Francis was called, lived with his family while attending technical college and working.

One day, a worried Tellie called Chip: She might be pregnant.

They agreed to talk it over on their next Wednesday date. On Tuesday evening, Chip and his sister Claire visited their older sister Pat. She was going to keep Chip's car, his beloved 1958 Chevy Impala convertible, after he went into the Army. On the way home, a tractor-trailer slammed into them. Chip was killed, and Claire was seriously injured.

Tellie kept silent. "I didn't have the heart to say anything to Mr. Ferraiolo after him losing one child then having another in the hospital," she recalled recently.

Back in Nova Scotia, Tellie decided the baby deserved a chance at a better life than she could offer. But she never forgot him, even after she married and had another child.

"I have two other children, and each time I saw them playing it always hurt a little because in my heart I knew there should have been three little heads instead of two," Tellie said.

She feels blessed to have Larry back in her life.

"It's wonderful after 37 years to be able to share life with each other," she said. They video-chat and e-mail often. It was Tellie who urged Newman to find his father's family, too.

#### LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE

Last November, John Ferraiolo got the call that sent chills down his spine.

"As soon as he asked me if I had a brother Frank, I thought, 'It's you, isn't it?' I'd been waiting for this phone call forever," said Ferraiolo, a train conductor.

What Newman didn't know was that Chip, who faced going to Vietnam, had confided the news to his own father. Years later, John learned Chip's secret one night as he and his father reminisced. John filed the information away for the next quarter-century and held on the family's home, a white Colonial with black shutters and a red front door, just in case.

Soon after that phone call, Newman drove up to the house to meet his uncle and seven aunts, one of whom had flown in from Colorado. John came out, shook his hand, and then it was on into the house where all the aunts were lined up: Patricia, Claire, Kathleen, Marianne, Tara, Aileen and Alicia.

There was an awkward silence for a moment.

"I'm Alicia, lucky number 7!" said one, and she came forward and kissed him. Soon everyone was poring over pictures, yearbooks, and talking, talking. They were amazed that Larry had bowled in high school; Chip had loved to bowl. Claire, who had been in the car with Larry and still bears scars, needed to touch him.

Just like Tellie, this hard-working family, including telephone operators and firefighters, didn't care about his financial success. He is one of them, and that was enough to embrace him.

In the past year, Newman has been busy with his three families. He's now one of 24 Ferraiolo cousins, and regularly attends family events. A family tree lists Larry Newman under the name of his father, and he has visited Chip's grave.

"I think it's wonderful," said his mother, Rose Mary Newman. "They all seem to be very good people, and who gets to get too many good people in their lives?"

In the year that's followed, Newman lost his job in a company downsizing. Now, he's working for adoption legislation to enable adoptees to get easier access to their records.

He wants to develop talents like his flair for art, which he left behind in his drive to succeed in the business world. That drive is not so important now, he said.

It's been replaced with a sense of peace that he feels could only have come from such a tumultuous journey. Now family is important, and Newman feels that at 37, he's finally ready to settle down and have one of his own.

"I'm more comfortable with my self, more grounded. I'm more accepting of the rough and tumble of life, that every family has challenges and nothing is perfect," he said. "I don't have to meet expectations anymore. I feel accepted."

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